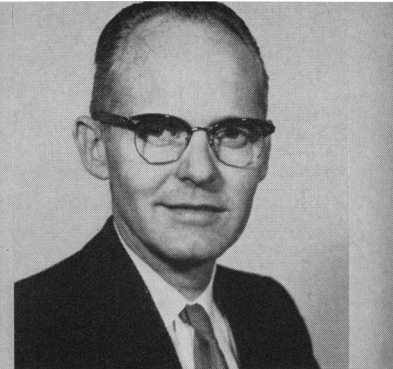


The President's Page



Socialized Health—A Tragic British Experiment

"Those who will not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

—CREDIT LOST

IF YOU READ a recent editorial of the *British Medical Journal*, you were probably startled by the title "A Pretty Ghastly Awful Picture." Lord Taylor made that remark during a debate in Parliament on their National Health Service (NHS). The significance of the remark is missed, however, if you did not know that Lord Taylor is a prominent physician, a leading socialist, who was raised to the House of Lords as a reward for his service in socializing medicine in Britain!

Let us see how some of the architects of government-run medicine feel about their scheme now. His Lordship said the growing shortage of doctors is "a new and desperate situation." Outside the teaching hospitals the NHS has survived only by the importation of some 4,000 foreign doctors. He continued: "I cannot recommend . . . [going] into such hospitals as an emergency case . . . a house officer will . . . treat you, and his experience will be far less than your own practitioner's . . . When he comes, he well could have difficulty understanding what you say." All of this is occurring as Britain's own doctors, with their higher educational and quality standards, are "leaving . . . for other countries."

And on top of all of this has been the devastating recommendation of the usual infallible "Government committees which seem to be symptomatic of the static society which is Britain today," to make a 10 per cent cut in the intake of medical students! What a classic example of government's omnipotence in solving problems! Such a decision in the face of a continuous yearly decline since 1951 in the number of medical students!

Compounded with the crumbling of quality and the flight of ability has been the disintegration of that core of medical practice, the general practitioner, "into wet-nurse to the members of our welfare state . . . His final separation from the life of a hospital and forbiddance to see patients there" has torn the heart and soul out of a nation's medical resource.

Medicine, crushed by impact of minutiae of penalties for the offender against the established precedent, loses the capacity to breathe, to experiment, to grow. "We recall," the *British Medical Journal's* editorial says, "the G.P. who was fined by NHS for prescribing insulin for a diabetic in the days before this discovery had reached the ears of the groundlings!"

At long last Britain is beginning to realize the catastrophe that has overtaken its health: Waste instead of efficiency; mediocrity rather than quality; deadly centralization as a substitute for experimentation and flexibility; compulsory government health service instead of voluntary private health programs; government dictated medicine in place of personal physician-patient guided medicine.

Take heed, all of us! America must learn from the mistakes of others, if she does not want to repeat them. Let's make it our job to know of the failure of Britain in Health, to broadcast it to all citizens.

People in Britain are now trying to find freedom again for medical services there. Rarely is freedom recaptured without revolt. Wise men have only one answer: It must not be lost in the first place.

Harold Bostick M.D.

Reprints of Dr. Bostick's essay are available from the Public Relations Department of the California Medical Association, 693 Sutter Street, San Francisco 2.